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ABSTRACT

As a designated service integration state, West Virginia is developing and implementing enhanced services to children in need. One state effort is the development and use of "Multi-Use Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals." The application includes a parental waiver statement, which, when signed, allows income information to be shared among specific agencies that provide eligible children with entitled services: Medicaid, school textbooks, and instructional supplies. The U.S. Department of Agriculture raised concerns about confidentiality and about whether the multi-use application might inhibit participation in the National School Lunch Program. To address these concerns, interviews and other data collection were undertaken for 600 families who had completed the application in a rural farm county, a rural nonfarm county, and an urban county. Results include the following: (1) there was no significant drop in the number of applications for free and reduced price meals during the study period; (2) opinions of interviewed families did not differ by rural-urban status; (3) 93 percent believed their children received healthy, well-balanced meals; (4) 86 percent signed the waiver of confidentiality; and (5) 98 percent believed the "Other Benefits" section of the application should be continued. Includes the interview guide and response data. (SV)

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ED 371 923

# *AN EVALUATION OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE INCLUSION OF PARENTAL WAIVERS IN THE APPLICATION FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE SCHOOL MEALS*

*WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION*
*Charleston, West Virginia*

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*February, 1994*

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It must be emphasized that any errors found in this Report are the sole responsibility of the author.

David A. Puzzuoli
February, 1994

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## AN EVALUATION OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE INCLUSION OF PARENTAL WAIVERS IN THE APPLICATION FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE SCHOOL MEALS

As a designated service integration state, West Virginia is in the process of developing and implementing enhanced services to children in need. One of the State's specific efforts is the development and use of a *Multi-use Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals;* the *Application* includes a parental waiver statement which, when signed, allows income information to be shared with specific agencies providing services to children of low income families. The purpose of the *Multi-use Application* is to share confidential information between/among specific agencies in order to allow access by eligible children to entitled services, namely, Medicaid, school textbooks, and instructional supplies.

West Virginia Code 18-2-5b authorizes the State Board of Education to become a Medicaid provider and delegate the provider status to county school districts and Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs).

An interagency work group, consisting of staff members from the Department of Education and Health and Human Resources, was established and meets on a regular basis to develop the process/system to be used and address ongoing needs. Fifty-five county school districts and 91 individual practitioners are enrolled as Medicaid providers for the education system.

Over the past years, the School Health Advisory Committee attempted several techniques for identifying students who may be eligible for Medicaid benefits but are not actual recipients. The State of West Virginia was granted permission by the United States Department of Agriculture to use a multi-use application for free/reduced price school meals. The application was expanded to allow parents or guardians to express an interest in receiving Medicaid benefits.

If an interest in Medicaid benefits is indicated by parents, this information is compiled at the school district level for collection at the appropriate RESA office; it is then forwarded to the assigned Regional Income Maintenance Office for use by the outstanding eligibility workers.

The adapted Free and Reduced School Meal applications and priority referrals from counselors, teachers, and providers have generated over 15,000 referrals. While many of the individuals who indicated an interest in Medicaid are already receiving benefits, a number of families have been approved for Medicaid as a result of this process.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has raised relevant and appropriate questions and concerns regarding the *Multi-use Application.* USDA points to the need to protect the family's and children's rights regarding the confidentiality of information and has concerns regarding a potential barrier or inhibitor the *Multi-use Application* could pose to a family's application and

participation in the National School Lunch Program. The USDA's questions and concerns deserve appropriate attention and valid responses from the state of West Virginia, Department of Education.

In addition to the USDA's questions and concerns, there is the issue of benefits to children which may accrue from the use of the *Multi-use Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals.* It has been estimated that approximately 120,000 children in West Virginia may be in need of health benefits; through the use of the *Multi-use Application*, a significant proportion of these children may be identified as eligible for Medicaid and receive needed services. In addition, children's learning experiences may be enhanced with the provision of school textbooks and instructional supplies as signaled by the use of the *Multi-use Application.*

Status of West Virginia

West Virginia's terrain can be described as a mountainous, river-carved beautiful wilderness. These same aesthetics of its geological formations are both a screen for and a cause of the economic depravation and environmental conditions in which the State's children are expected to grow and develop into healthy, intellectually active, productive adults. West Virginia is the only state totally within Appalachia, and its demographics characterize the generally held perception of Appalachia -- economically and culturally isolated by its history and traditions,

a mountainous region with hopes deferred resulting from exploitation by external capital interests.

Table 1 displays selected demographic data of the United States, West Virginia, and three West Virginia counties (Greenbrier, McDowell, and Wood). West Virginia's population is approximately 1.8 million; in general, the State's population is relatively older than the nation's population. The health needs of the population are serviced by a smaller mean number of physicians than the national mean, and, as expected due to its older population, the birth rate is less than the nation's birth rate. Although the State has spent a larger *per capita* expenditure for education, a relatively small proportion of the citizenry attained 12 years or more of education, and approximately one in ten West Virginians attained 16 or more years of education. Economically, the State's *per capita* income is approximately 30.0 percent less than the national mean *per capita* income, unemployment and poverty (individual persons and families) are higher than national means.

The West Virginia Department of Education administers United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) child nutrition programs including the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Congress authorized the National School Lunch Program in 1946; additional child nutrition programs were funded, and nutrition education was coordinated with school food services. In West Virginia, more than 48 million federal dollars annually subsidize children's

Table 1
SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC DATA[1] OF GREENBRIER, MCDOWELL, AND WOOD COUNTIES, WEST VIRGINIA

| Demographic | United States | West Virginia | Greenbrier County | McDowell County | Wood County |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Population* | | | | | |
| Total Persons | $2.48 \times 10^8$ | $1.79 \times 10^6$ | 34,693 | 35,233 | 86,915 |
| Percent 65 yrs.+ | 12.6 | 15.0 | 16.9 | 14.7 | 14.8 |
| Percent under 14 yrs. | 21.6 | 20.1 | 19.5 | 23.0 | 21.0 |
| Female Family HH | 11.6 | 10.7 | 10.6 | 14.3 | 10.2 |
| *Health* | | | | | |
| Physician/100,000 pop. | 210 | 168 | 153 | 65 | 141 |
| Birth rate/1,000 pop. | 15.9 | 11.6 | 11.4 | 12.9 | 12.4 |
| Hospital Beds/100,000 pop. | 499 | 580 | 360 | 320 | 638 |
| *Education* | | | | | |
| Percent attained 12 yrs. or more | 66.5 | 56.0 | 53.3 | 35.9 | 65.1 |
| Percent attained 16 yrs. or more | 16.2 | 10.4 | 10.5 | 5.2 | 11.4 |
| Per Capita Expend. on education | $451 | $454 | $443 | $508 | $432 |
| *Economic* | | | | | |
| Percent below poverty: persons | 12.4 | 15.0 | 15.0 | 23.5 | 19.3 |
| Percent below poverty: families | 9.6 | 11.7 | 12.4 | 19.3 | 16.3 |
| Per Capita Income | $17,592 | $12,434 | $12,487 | $8,670 | $14,211 |
| Unemployment Rate[2] | 7.2 | 11.1 | 9.4 | 22.2 | 10.3 |

[1]Slater, Courtney M. and Hall, George E. (Eds.) *1992 County and City Extra: Annual Metro, City, and County Data Book*, Lanham MD: Berman Press, 1992.

[2]*Ecomonic Summary*. Charleston WV: W.Va. Bureau of Employment Programs, Office of Labor and Economic Research, November, 1992.

meals in schools, institutions, child care and Head Start centers, day care homes and summer camps, and meals for functionally impaired adults in Adult Day Care Centers.

In the 1991-92 academic year, the National School Lunch Program in West Virginia provides low cost lunches in 899 public schools, 19 private schools, and 49 institutions. The School Breakfast Program provides breakfasts in 892 public schools, 5 private schools, and 49 institutions.

Based on current records, West Virginia public school children receive daily:

| | |
|---|---|
| 186,312 | School Lunches (55% free and reduced price) |
| 77,396 | School Breakfasts (75% free and reduced price) |

These meals are derived from an approved application pattern for 1992-93 as follows:

| Current Enrollment | Free Applications | Reduced Price Applications | Total Approved Applications |
|---|---|---|---|
| 317,751 | 113,104 | 22,624 | 135,728 |

As to be discussed in later sections of this proposal, Greenbrier, McDowell, and Wood counties were selected as the data base for this Study. The data displayed in Table 1 appear to indicate the demographics of these three counties establish a need for using the *Multi-use Application for Free and Reduced Price* School Meals. In three categories (Health, Education, Economics), the counties' adult population and children are in need of assistance from external agencies to provide basic services, e.g., Medicaid and other entitled services.

As recently reported[1], approximately 26 percent of the State's residents under 18 years of age (children) lived in families with an income below the 1989 federal poverty level. In McDowell county, 50 percent of its children lived below the 1989 poverty level; similar data for Greenbrier county was 24.0 percent, and Wood county's was 19.0 The percent of children living in poverty in West Virginia grew by 52 percent during the period 1979-89,[2] as a nation, the percent of children living in poverty expanded 26 percent for the same 10 year period. West Virginia's poverty growth rate for children was twice the nation's.

An indicator of the well-being of children is Benefits as Percent of Poverty; this indicator is the percentage of the previous year's U.S. poverty threshold covered by the combination of current year state AFDC and Food Stamp benefit levels for a one-parent family of four persons. In 1990, West Virginia's Benefits as Percent of Poverty was 60.2 percent; the Nation's was 68.2.[3]

A recent study by Price Waterhouse[4] reported the following findings.

- School Breakfast Program: Among the States, West Virginia received the second highest Federal reimbursement *per capita.*

---

[1]Sunday Gazette-Mail, Charleston WV, August 16, 1992.

[2]*Kids Count Data Book*: *State Profiles of Child Well Being*, Washington, D.C.: The Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1991.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Price Waterhouse, *Status of Children and Families in West Virginia*, Washington D.C.: January, 1992.

- West Virginia has the third highest participation rate in the Food Stamp Program in the Nation, nearly twice the national average.

- Nearly 40 percent of children ages 0-18 live at or below 133 percent of the federal poverty level.

- Between 1980 and 1988, the percent of population receiving public assistance increased 35 percent; nationally, there was a 6.2 percent decline.

- West Virginia's children of all ages have a greater incidence of dental caries than the national average incidence.

These data validate the need for significantly different approaches than implemented in the past to help children grow and develop in a positive direction. The use of the *Multi-use Application* has been a bold step toward implementing a new model for aiding children; this Study will determine the consequences of this step by the West Virginia Department of Education.

## STUDY OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

As a consequence of USDA's questions/concerns and the issue raised relating to the potential benefits for children, appropriate and relevant questions for this study were formulated: "Does the controlled sharing of information have an effect on *application rates* in the National School Lunch Program? Does it present a barrier (to application)? Does it encourage people to apply?"

Evaluation Study Objectives

The objectives of this evaluation study are presented in the form of questions. The evaluation study was designed to generate data/information which addressed these questions and provided viable responses to them.

Specific questions to be addressed were:

1a. Does the West Virginia Department of Education *Multi-use Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals* inhibit or enhance participation of low income children in the National School Lunch Program?

1b. Is the degree of inhibition or enhancement significantly different between/among a rural-agriculture county, a rural-non-farm county, and an urban county?

2. Has there been a significant increase over the previous year in

the number of referrals to the Department of Health and Human Resources for Medicaid information and/or services to eligible children resulting from the use of the *Multi-use Application*?

3. Has there been a significant increase over the previous year of providing school textbooks and instructional supplies to eligible children resulting from the use of the *Multi-use Application*?

Data Collection

For this study, appropriate and relevant data/information were found in three separate locations: state, local education agency, and individual families. Although housed in separate locations, the data/information formed an integrated whole necessary for responding to the Study Questions and objectives (questions).

State. These data were aggregate state data on the number of applications for Free and Reduced Price School Meals and the participation rates. For comparison purposes, this data was collected for the 1991-92 and 1992-93 Academic Years.

Local Education Agency (LEA). Data relating to the frequency and percent of families choosing to sign the waiver section of the *Multi-use Application* and, subsequently, receiving additional benefits was provided by the LEAs.

In collaboration with USDA, the West Virginia Department of Education identified three counties (LEAs) as a representative sample of the State's 55

counties (LEAs). Those counties were Greenbrier (rural-agricultural), McDowell (rural-non-agricultural), and Wood (urban). Data retrieved from these three LEAs were considered as representative of the total State and extrapolated accordingly.

Family. Family data/information submitted for National School Lunch Programs for the 1991-92 or 1992-93 Academic Years were required to determine the effect (inhibiting, enhancing, or none) of the waiver in the selective confidentiality section of the *Multi-use Application.*

The family data were retrieved from 600 families in the three counties identified in the State Level data discussion given above. The 600 families were proportioned by the number of children enrolled in or eligible for Free and Reduced Price School Meals in the three counties.

Selecting the Interview Sample. Calculations for determining the number of families per county to be interviewed are presented in Exhibit A, attached. The basis for proporting the families is given above. Data presented in Exhibit A indicate Greenbrier County had 23.4 percent of the total number of approved children (12,996) in October 1992; McDowell had 38.2 percent of the total approved children, and Wood County had 38.4 percent.

The percentages (23.4, 38.2, 38.4) were used to proportion the 600 families among the three counties. Thus, 140 families from Greenbrier County 230 families from McDowell County, and 230 families from Wood County were

considered as the interview sample for the Study. The number of families from each county represented a 4.6 percent sample of the number of children approved for Free and Reduced Price School Meals.

The 4.6 percent sample of families from each county were selected by a random, statistical process from the total population of approved applications in each county. The process included the assignment of a number to each approved application and a computer generated set of random numbers identified the families to be interviewed.

Family data were collected through structured telephone interviews. As necessary or required, members of the evaluation study team conducted home visits to collect the appropriate data. A copy of the *Interview Guide* is presented in Exhibit B.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Statistical significance for the findings of this study was identified as the 0.05 level of confidence. As required or appropriate, the collected data were treated with the Chi-Square treatment to determine if any found differences were statistically significant.

In addition to the statistical treatment of collected data to determine if any significant differences occurred between/among the three study counties, descriptive data/information for the three counties are presented in graphic and/or tabular

format as appropriate. The descriptive data are reported as frequencies and percentages to assist in presenting a narrative report for each county and the counties as a group; data are also reported by Academic Year (1991-92 and 1992-93).

Study Management and Operations

The implementation of this evaluation study was divided into two inter-related components: Management and Operations. The West Virginia Department of education (WVDOE) was responsible for general management and monitoring of the Study. WVDOE appointed a project director who functioned as the Study's chief administrative officer and served as a liaison officer with USDA for this study.

Operations. The subgrantee (David A. Puzzuoli) had primary responsibilities for operationalizing the evaluation study. These responsibilities included (1) designing and administering all data collection instruments, (2) collecting all required and appropriate data, (3) conducting telephone interviews and home visits, (4) recruiting and training support staff for data collection activities, (5) monitoring and making appropriate corrections to the Study's progress, (6) statistical analysis of all collected data, (7) providing interim oral or written reports to WVDOE's project director as requested or required, (8) writing and editing a *Final Report* on the Study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations including appropriate

tables, graphs, and charts, and (9) submission of an original plus five copies of the *Final Report* to WVDOE.

Collaboration on Data Analysis. The WVDOE and the subgrantee collaborated on the analysis process of the collected data. The subgrantee input the collected data to WVDOE by the agreed upon format. WVDOE personnel were responsible for constructing the Study's data base, configuring data to meet Study needs, and generating required hard copies of the data and analysis results from statistical treatment.

## PRESENTATION OF DATA

In October 1991, 34.1 percent of the children enrolled in West Virginia's schools received Free school meals and 7.1 percent received Reduced Price school meals. By October 1992, the percent of children in West Virginia's schools receiving Free meals had increased to 35.4 percent, and those receiving Reduced Price meals had increased to 7.2 percent. These increases occurred despite a drop in West Virginia's total school enrollment between 1991 and 1992 (a drop of 1.4 percent or 4,558 students). These data are displayed in Tables 2 and 3.

Comparable data for Greenbrier, McDowell, and Wood counties are also displayed in Tables 2 and 3. In 1991, 41.2 percent (34.1 + 7.1) of West Virginia's school children received Free or Reduced Price school meals; the percent of school children receiving Free or Reduced Price school meals in Greenbrier, McDowell, and Wood counties were 48.1 percent, 66.4 percent, and 31.5 percent, respectively. In 1992, these percentages were 42.6, 48.1, 68.6, and 33.3 for West Virginia, Greenbrier, McDowell, and Wood county, respectively; therefore, approximately one-half of the school children in Greenbrier, seventy-percent in McDowell, and one-third of the school children in Wood County received Free or Reduced school meals.

**Table 2**

**TOTAL ENROLLMENT, NUMBER OF APPROVED CHILDREN, AND PERCENT OF TOTAL ENROLLMENT PARTICIPATING IN THE FREE AND REDUCED PRICE SCHOOL MEALS IN GREENBRIER COUNTY, McDOWELL COUNTY, WOOD COUNTY, AND WEST VIRGINIA (October 1991 and October 1992)**

| County | Total Enrollment 10/91 | Approved Free Meals 10/91 | Percent of Total 10/91 | Reduced Price Meals 10/91 | Percent of Total 10/91 | Total Enrollment 10/92 | Approved Free 10/92 | Percent of Total 10/92 | Approved Reduced 10/92 | Percent of Total 10/92 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 6,377 | 2,361 | 37.0 | 707 | 11.1 | 6,320 | 2,376 | 37.6 | 665 | 10.5 |
| McDowell | 7,461 | 4,400 | 59.0 | 549 | 7.4 | 7,238 | 4,423 | 61.1 | 540 | 7.5 |
| Wood | 15,106 | 3,816 | 25.3 | 934 | 6.2 | 15,016 | 4,014 | 26.7 | 978 | 6.5 |
| W.Va. | 320,913 | 109,545 | 34.1 | 22,651 | 7.1 | 316,355 | 112,072 | 35.4 | 22,880 | 7.2 |

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**Table 3**

**TOTAL ENROLLMENT FOR GREENBRIER COUNTY, McDOWELL COUNTY, WOOD COUNTY, AND WEST VIRGINIA (October 1991 and October 1992)**

| County | Total Enrollment October 1991 | Percent of State Enrollment: Oct. 1991 | Total Enrollment October 1992 | Percent Change 1991-1992 | Percent of State Enrollment: Oct. 1992 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 6,377 | 2.0 | 6,320 | -0.9 | 2.0 |
| McDowell | 7,461 | 2.3 | 7,238 | -3.0 | 2.3 |
| Wood | 15,106 | 4.7 | 15,016 | -0.6 | 4.7 |
| W.Va. | 320,913 | 100.0 | 316,355 | -1.4 | 100.0 |

Number of Interviewed Families

The total number of families randomly selected to form the interview sample was 600; see Exhibit A. The number of families per county was Greenbrier: 140, McDowell: 230, and Wood: 230. The names of the selected families (parents, guardians, foster parents, extended families) and their addresses, telephone numbers, and grade and school of their children were given to the interview team members (N=6). This information was provided by the respective school districts.

Of the 600 sample families, 425 were interviewed; thus, 70.8 percent[1] of the original sample of families was interviewed. Forty Five of the interviews were conducted through home visits[2], and 380 were telephone interviews (89.4% of total interviews). The most prevalent barriers to the interviewing process were (1) telephone disconnects, (2) child and/or family moved out of the school district, (3) child and/or family moved and left no forwarding address with the child's school or neighbor. It must be reported that the interview team received open cooperation and cordial hospitality from the interviewed families. Only one family refused to

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[1]Berdie states, "(in telephone surveys) response rates of 65-75% are needed before non-response bias is reduced to a level where it is not likely to have a significant effect..."; see Berdie, Doug R. *High Interview Response Rates: Much Ado About Nothing*, a paper presented to the American Educational Research Association, Boston, April 16-20, 1990.

[2]The prevalent reasons for making home visits to conduct interviews were the sample family had no telephone or an available telephone belonged to a relative or neighbor some distance away and messages to return calls were not delivered or responded to.

be interviewed. The telephone interviews and/or home visits were completed during the period July 15-July 31, 1993. (An exception to this time frame occurred in McDowell County; six home visits were conducted during the first week of August.)

Demographics of Interviewed Families

Table 4 displays the number and percent of Interviewed Families by Academic Year in Greenbrier, McDowell, and Wood counties. Of the 425 interviewed families, 52.7 percent were families with children who participated in Free and Reduced Price School Meals during the 1991-92 academic year and 47.3 percent participated during the 1992-93 academic year. It was expected the 1991-92 sub-group would be larger because the three county school districts experienced a cumulative decline in pupil population over the two academic years under study.

Grade Levels. Table 5 displays the number and percent of Interviewed Families by Grade Levels (K-4, 5-8, 9-12) in Greenbrier, McDowell, and Wood counties. It can be observed that the number and percent of families decreased as the grade level increased; for example, more than twice the families had K-4 children (197) than 9-12 children (85). This trend was expected because as children moved from lower to higher grades they dropped out of the Free and Reduced School Meals Program. During the interviews, families confirmed that

TABLE 4

Number and Percent of Interviewed Families by Academic Year in Greenbrier, McDowell, and Wood Counties

| County | 1991-92 N | 1991-92 Percent | 1992-93 N | 1992-93 Percent | Total N | Total Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 80 | 56.3 | 62 | 43.7 | 142 | 100.0 |
| McDowell | 69 | 55.2 | 56 | 44.8 | 125 | 100.0 |
| Wood | 75 | 47.5 | 83 | 52.5 | 158 | 100.0 |
| Total | 224 | 52.7 | 201 | 47.3 | 425 | 100.0 |

TABLE 5

Number and Percent of Interviewed Families by Grade Level (K-4, 5-8, 9-12) in Greenbrier, McDowell, and Wood Counties

| | Grade Levels | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | K-4 | | 5-8 | | 9-12 | |
| County | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| Greenbrier | 57 | 40.7 | 41 | 29.3 | 42 | 30.0 |
| McDowell | 55 | 45.1 | 53 | 43.4 | 14 | 11.5 |
| Wood | 85 | 56.3 | 37 | 24.5 | 29 | 19.2 |
| Total | 197 | 47.7 | 131 | 31.7 | 85 | 20.6 |

their older children refused to participate because of self-consciousness, embarrassment, and/or peer pressure.

Family Responses. Interviewed families were requested to respond to the question "*Do you believe your child is receiving healthy, well-balanced meals at school?*". The number of "Yes" responses to the question is reported in Table 6 by county and academic year. Two hundred and fifteen (215) of 224 families (96.0 percent) in the 1991-92 subgroup responded in the affirmative, and 181 of the 201 families (90.0 percent) in the 1992-93 subgroup responded in the affirmative. As a total group, 93.2 percent of the 425 families believed their children received healthy, well-balanced meals, see Figure 1.

In order to determine if there was any significant differences among the responses from families in the respective three counties, a Chi-Square was calculated. The calculated Chi-Square value (1.90) was not found to be statistically significant. (With 2 degrees of freedom, the significant Chi-Square value at the 0.05 level of confidence is 5.99 and at the 0.01 level is 9.21.)

Twenty nine of the families (6.8 percent) offered the following reasons as to why they did not believe their children were receiving healthy, well-balanced meals.

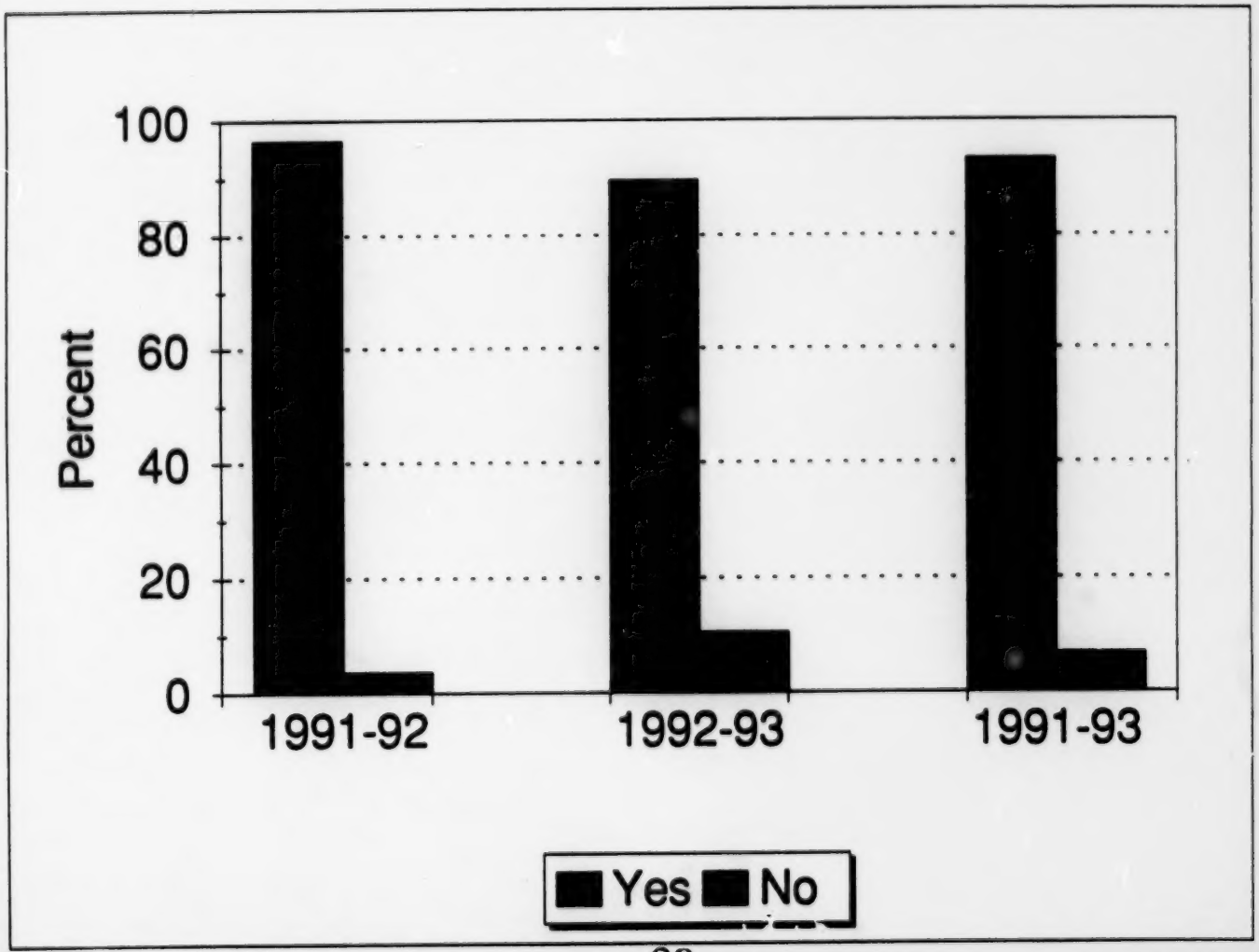
1. Too many fast food items on the menu.
2. The meals contain too much fat.
3. The meals contain too much sugar.
4. Meats and vegetables are not thoroughly prepared.

Table 6

Frequency and Percent of *YES* Responses by Academic Year to
"Do You Believe Your Child is Receiving Healthy, Well-Balanced Meals at School?"

| County | 1991-92 Yes | 1991-92 Percent | 1992-93 Yes | 1992-93 Percent | Total Yes | Total Percent | Chi-Square |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 79 | 36.7 | 58 | 32.0 | 137 | 34.6 | |
| McDowell | 69 | 32.1 | 55 | 30.4 | 124 | 31.3 | |
| Wood | 67 | 31.2 | 68 | 37.6 | 135 | 34.1 | 1.90 |
| Total | 215 | 100.0 | 181 | 100.0 | 396 | 100.0 | |

Figure 1
Percent of Interviewed Families Who Believed Their Children
Are Receiving Healthy, Well Balanced Meals



5. The meals contain too much salt.

The greatest number of criticisms were related to the need to select menu items attractive to children as opposed to critiquing the nutritional value of the meal. Also, the families stated schools need to recognize that some children are vegetarians and should plan menus to meet these types of dietary needs.

The families were asked "*For how many of your school age children have you made application to receive Free and Reduced Price School Meals*?". Analysis of the responses to this question indicates the following:

1. The probability was high for a family to apply for all children when all the children were in the lower grades (K-4).
2. The frequency for applying for all children decreased as some of a family's children progressed to the upper grades (5-12).
3. The most frequent responses for not applying for all children were (a) older child was embarrassed, (b) peer pressure on older children, (c) older children did not like the school's menu, and (d) older child did not want family to apply with no explanation given to the interviewer.

The interviewed families were asked "*Was the application form easy to read*?". The number of "Yes" responses to the question is reported in Table 7 by county and academic year. The percent of families responding in the affirmative to this question was found to be 95.1, irrespective of the academic year (212 out of 224 and 192 out of 201), see Figure 2.

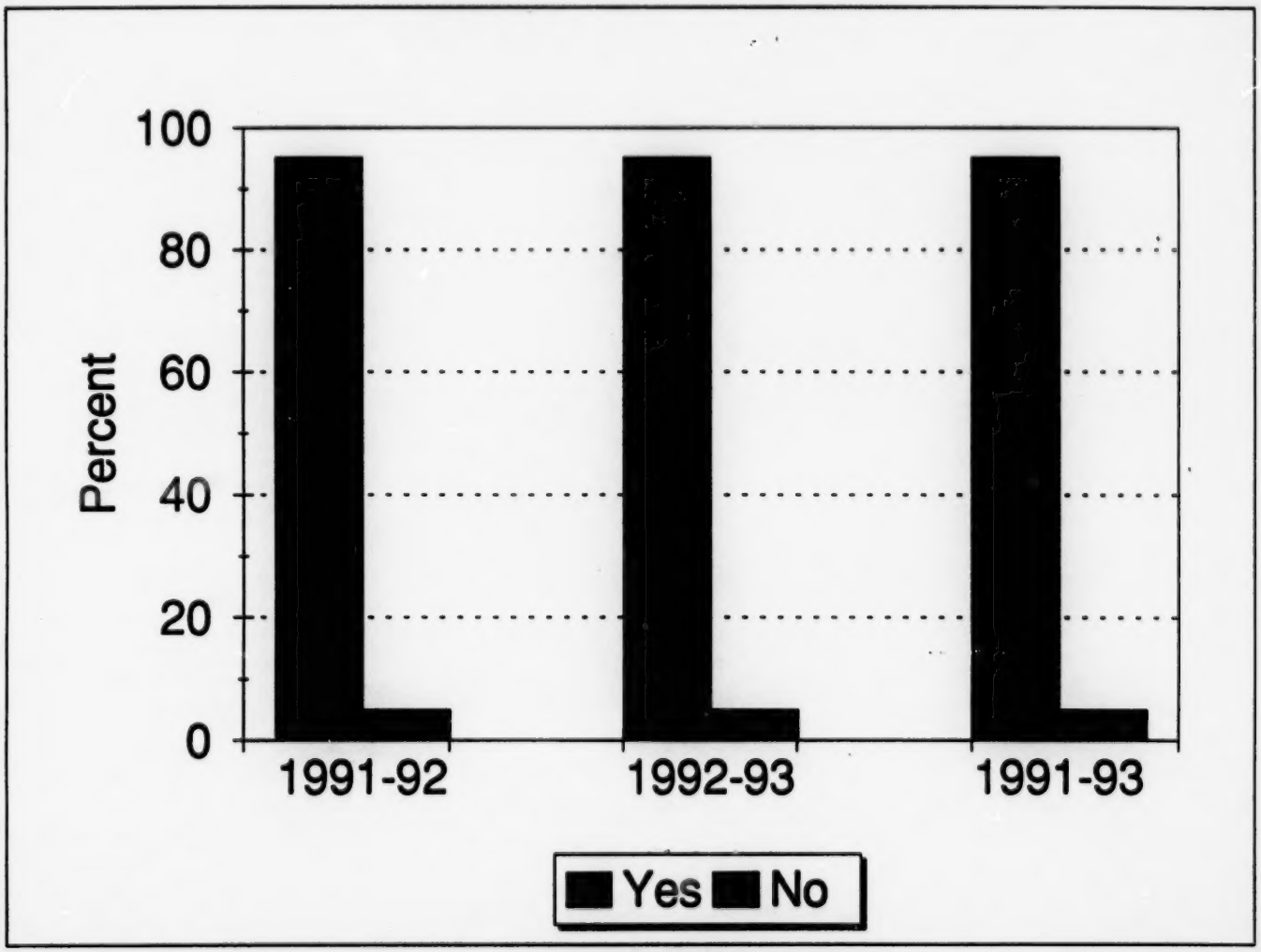
A Chi-Square was calculated to determine if any significant differences were found in the affirmative responses received from the three counties. The calculated

Table 7

Frequency and Percent of *YES* Responses by Academic Year to "Was the Application Form Easy to Read"

| County | 1991-92 Yes | 1991-92 Percent | 1992-93 Yes | 1992-93 Percent | Total Yes | Total Percent | Chi-Square |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 79 | 37.3 | 60 | 31.3 | 139 | 34.4 | |
| McDowell | 66 | 31.1 | 56 | 29.2 | 122 | 30.2 | |
| Wood | 67 | 31.6 | 76 | 39.6 | 143 | 35.4 | 3.00 |
| Total | 212 | 100.0 | 192 | 100.1 | 404 | 100.0 | |

Figure 2
Percent of Interviewed Families Who Responded
The Application Form Was Easy to Read



Chi-Square (3.00) is not statistically significant; thus, affirmative responses from an individual county was not statistically different from the remaining counties.

The families who responded in the negative (4.9 percent) provided the following as to why the application form was not easy to read.

1. The form is confusing to read.
2. Should be able to fill out one application to cover all children instead of one for each child.
3. Some people need help to fill out the application.
4. The application needs to be easier to understand.
5. Parents should be told that the school will provide help in filling the application.
6. Help people who can't read.

The interviewed families were asked "*Did you check the box on the application indicating you were interested in Medicaid*?" The number of "Yes" responses to the question is reported in Table 8 by county and academic year. The percent of 1991-92 families responding in the affirmative to this question was 57.1 (128 of 224), and the percent of 1992-93 families was 56.2 (113 of 201), see Figure 3.

A Chi-Square was calculated to determine if any significant differences were found in affirmative responses received from the three counties. The calculated Chi-Square (4.26) is not statistically significant; thus affirmative responses from an individual county was not statistically different from the remaining counties.

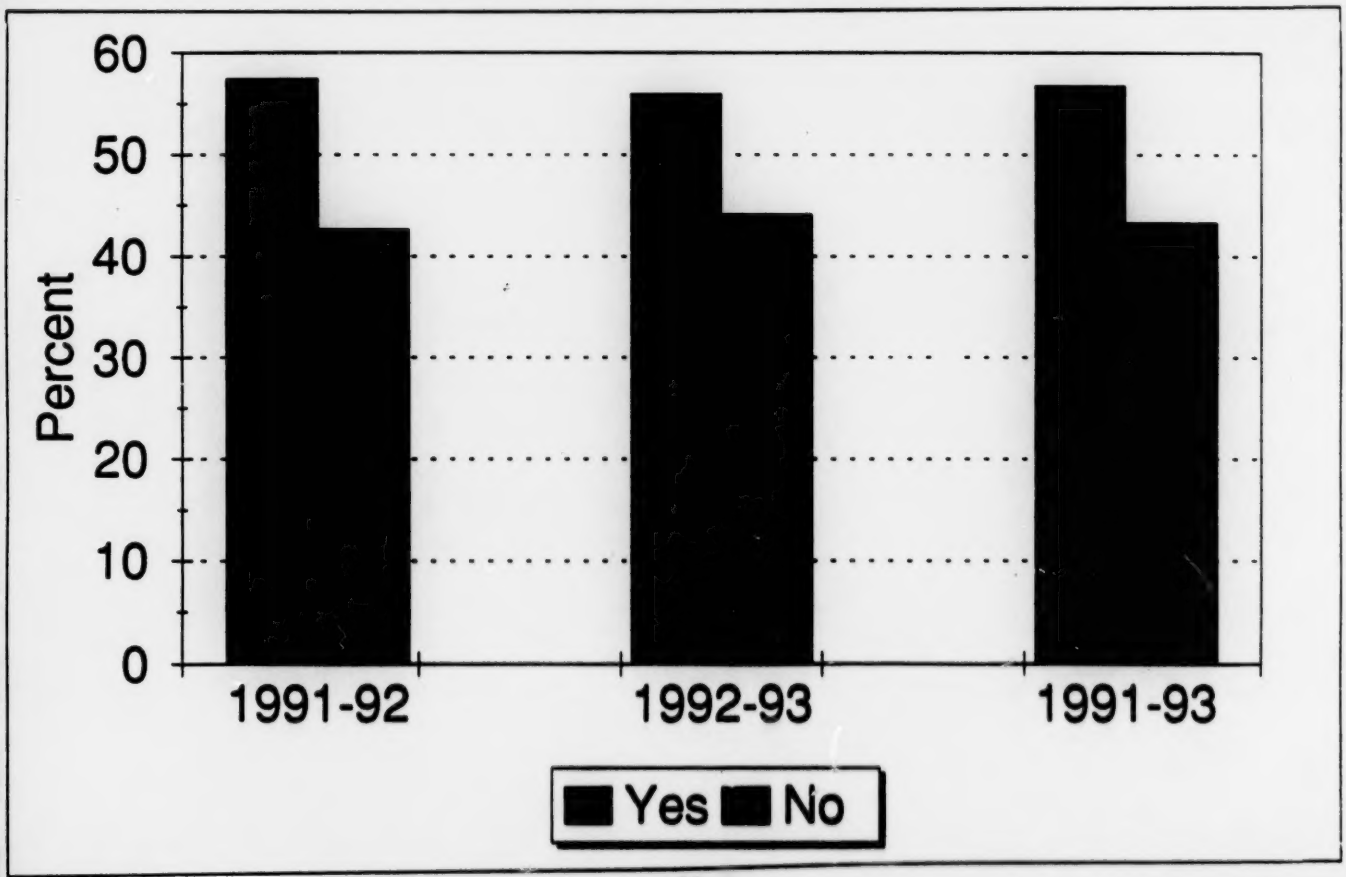
A Critical Ratio was calculated to determine if the 1991-92 percent of affirmative responses (57.1) was statistically different from the 1992-93 percent of

Table 8

Frequency and Percent of *Yes* Response by Academic Year to "Did You Check the Box on The Application Indicating You Were Interested in Medicaid?"

| County | 1991-92 Yes | 1991-92 Percent | 1992-93 Yes | 1992-93 Percent | Total Yes | Total Percent | Chi-Square |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 59 | 46.1 | 57 | 50.4 | 116 | 48.1 | |
| McDowell | 52 | 40.6 | 33 | 29.2 | 85 | 35.3 | |
| Wood | 17 | 13.3 | 23 | 20.4 | 40 | 16.6 | 4.26 |
| Totals | 128 | 100.0 | 113 | 100.0 | 241 | 100.0 | |

Figure 3
Percent of Interviewed Families Who Indicated They Were Interested in Medicaid



affirmative responses (56.2). The calculated Critical Ratio (0.19) was not found to be significant. (A Critical Ratio of 1.96 is required to be statistically significant at the 0.05 level of confidence.)

The interviewed families were asked "*Did you sign the waiver*?". The number of "Yes" responses to the question is reported in Table 9 by county and academic year. The percent of 1991-92 families responding in the affirmative to this question was 75.4 (169 of 224), and the percent of 1992-93 families was 86.7 (173 of 201), see Figure 4.

A Chi-Square was calculated to determine if any significant differences were found in affirmative responses received from the three counties. The calculated Chi-Square (6.79)[3] is statistically significant at the 0.05 level of confidence. In reviewing the data displayed in Table 9, it appears McDowell county families (20.2 percent) signed the waiver at a significantly lower rate than Wood (46.2 percent) and/or Greenbrier (33.5 percent) counties during the 1992-93 academic year.

A Critical Ratio was calculated to determine if the 1991-92 percent of affirmative responses (75.4) was statistically different from the 1992-93 percent of affirmative responses (86.1). The calculated Critical Ratio (2.78) is significant at the 0.05 level of confidence[4]. It appears the 1992-93 families signed the waiver

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[3]With 2 degrees of freedom, the Chi-Square value of 5.99 is required to be significant at the 0.05 level of confidence.

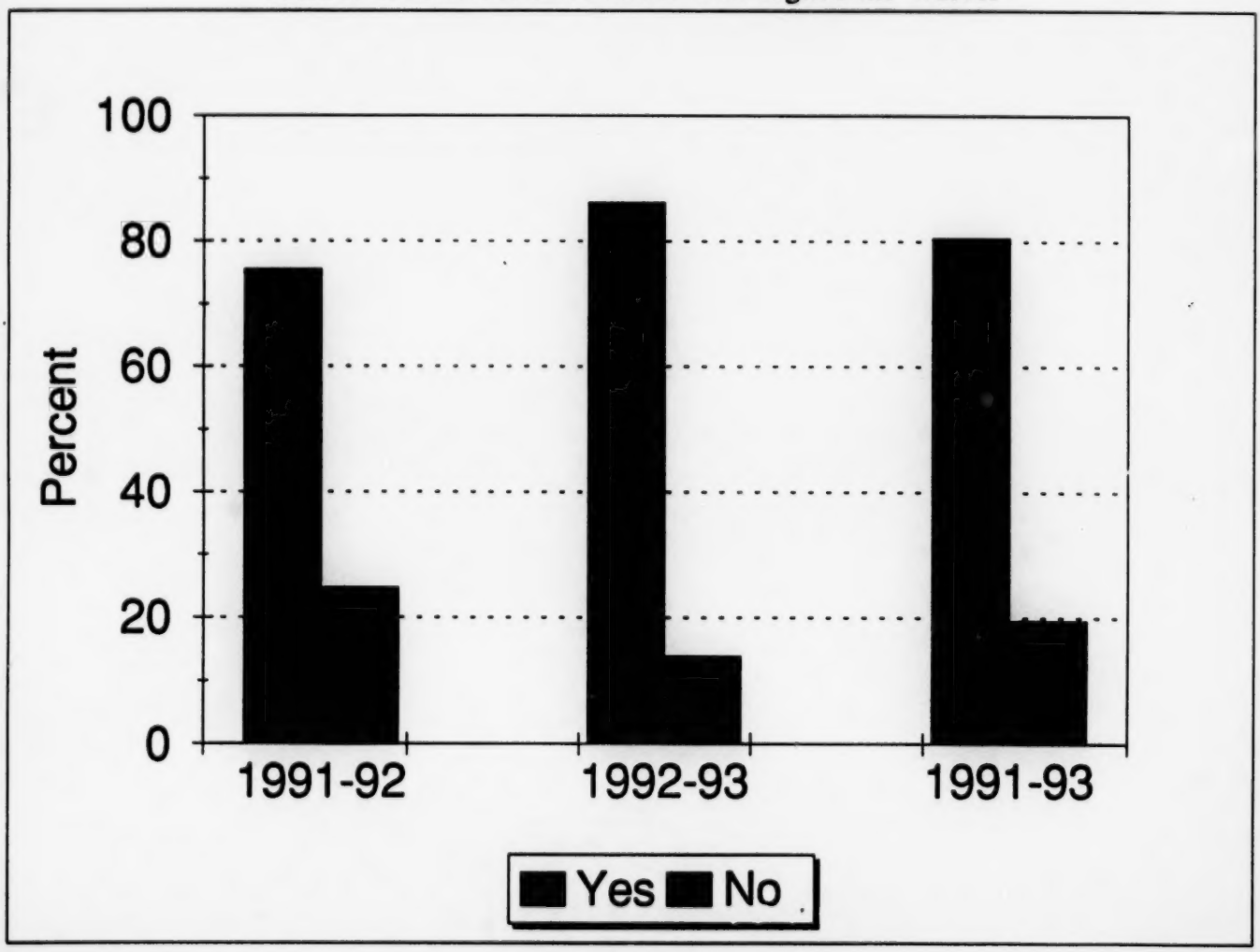
[4]A C.R. of 1.96 is required to be significant at the 0.05 level of confidence.

Table 9

Frequency and Percent of *YES* Responses by Academic Year to "Did You Sign the Waiver?"

| County | 1991-92 Yes | 1991-92 Percent | 1992-93 Yes | 1992-93 Percent | Total Yes | Total Percent | Chi-Square |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 59 | 34.9 | 58 | 33.5 | 117 | 34.2 | |
| McDowell | 52 | 30.8 | 35 | 20.2 | 87 | 25.4 | |
| Wood | 58 | 34.3 | 80 | 46.2 | 138 | 40.4 | 6.79 |
| Total | 169 | 100.0 | 173 | 99.9 | 342 | 100.0 | |

Figure 4
Percent of Interviewed Families Who Signed the Waiver



at a significantly higher rate than the 1991-92 families.

The interviewed families were asked, "*If you signed the waiver, have you been contacted by the Department of Health*?" The number of "Yes" responses to the question is reported in Table 10 by county and academic year. The percent of 1991-92 families who signed the waiver and responded in the affirmative to this question was 30.2 (51 of 169), and the percent of 1992-93 families who signed the waiver and responded in the affirmative was 30.6 (53 of 173), see Figure 5.

A Chi-Square was calculated to determine if any significant differences were found in the number of affirmative responses received from the three counties. The calculated Chi-Square (5.55) was not statistically significant but it approached significance (5.99 was required for significance).

Although the total percentage for the 1991-92 and 1992-93 academic years were approximately equal (30.2 and 30.6, respectively), there was a difference in response among the counties. In 1991-92, the percent of families who had been contacted by the Health Department after having signed the waiver ranged from 10.3 (Wood) to 44.2 (McDowell). In 1992-93, the range was from 20.0 percent (Wood) to 60.0 percent (McDowell). For the two academic years the cumulative percent range was 15.9 (Wood) to 50.6 (McDowell), see Figure 5.

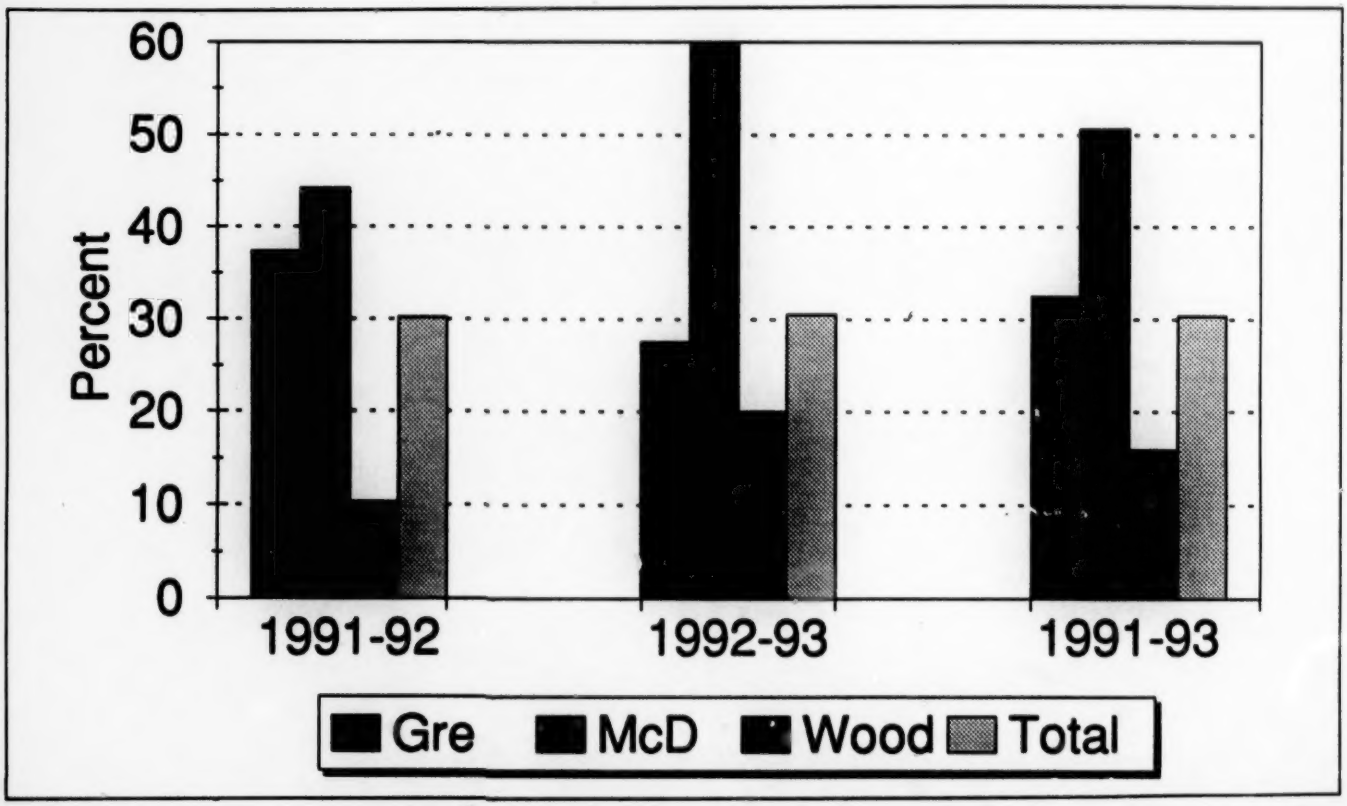
The interviewed families were asked, "*Would you tell of the benefits your child has received because you signed the waiver*?". The three most frequent

Table 10

Frequency and Percent of *Yes* Response by Academic Year to "If You Signed the Waiver, Have You Been Contacted by the Department of Health and Human Resources Concerning Medicaid?"

| County | 1991-92 Yes | 1991-92 Percent | 1992-93 Yes | 1992-93 Percent | Total Yes | Total Percent | Chi-Square |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 22 | 43.1 | 16 | 30.2 | 38 | 36.5 | |
| McDowell | 23 | 45.1 | 21 | 39.6 | 44 | 42.3 | |
| Wood | 6 | 11.8 | 16 | 30.2 | 22 | 21.2 | 5.55 |
| Totals | 51 | 100.0 | 53 | 100.0 | 104 | 100.0 | |

Figure 5
Percent of Interviewed Families Who Stated They Had Been Contacted By Medicaid After Having Signed the Waiver by County and Academic Year



responses to this question are reported in Table 11; they were Medicaid Card, Textbooks, and School Supplies.

Due to signing of the confidentiality waiver by the families, 9.6 percent (41 of 425) received a Medicaid card for their children, 45.2 percent (192 of 425) of the children received their textbooks, and 42.6 percent (181 of 425) of the children received school supplies.

The interviewed families were asked "*Do you believe the **Other Benefits** section on the application form for Free and Reduced Price School Meals should be continued*?". The number of "Yes" responses to the question is reported in Table 12 by county and academic year. The percent of 1991-92 families responding in the affirmative to this question was 98.7 (221 out of 224), and the percent of 1992-93 families responding in the affirmative was 98.0 (197 out of 201), see Figure 6. It appears the interviewed families approached unanimity in their support of keeping the ***Other Benefits*** section on the application form.

The interviewed families identified a number and variety of possible benefits for children due to keeping the section in the application form. In addition to Medicaid, textbooks, and school supplies the most frequently identified possible benefits identified were:

1. Information on obtaining clothing allowance for dependent children

Table 11

Frequency and Percent of Response per Benefit Received By Children Because the Waiver Was Signed

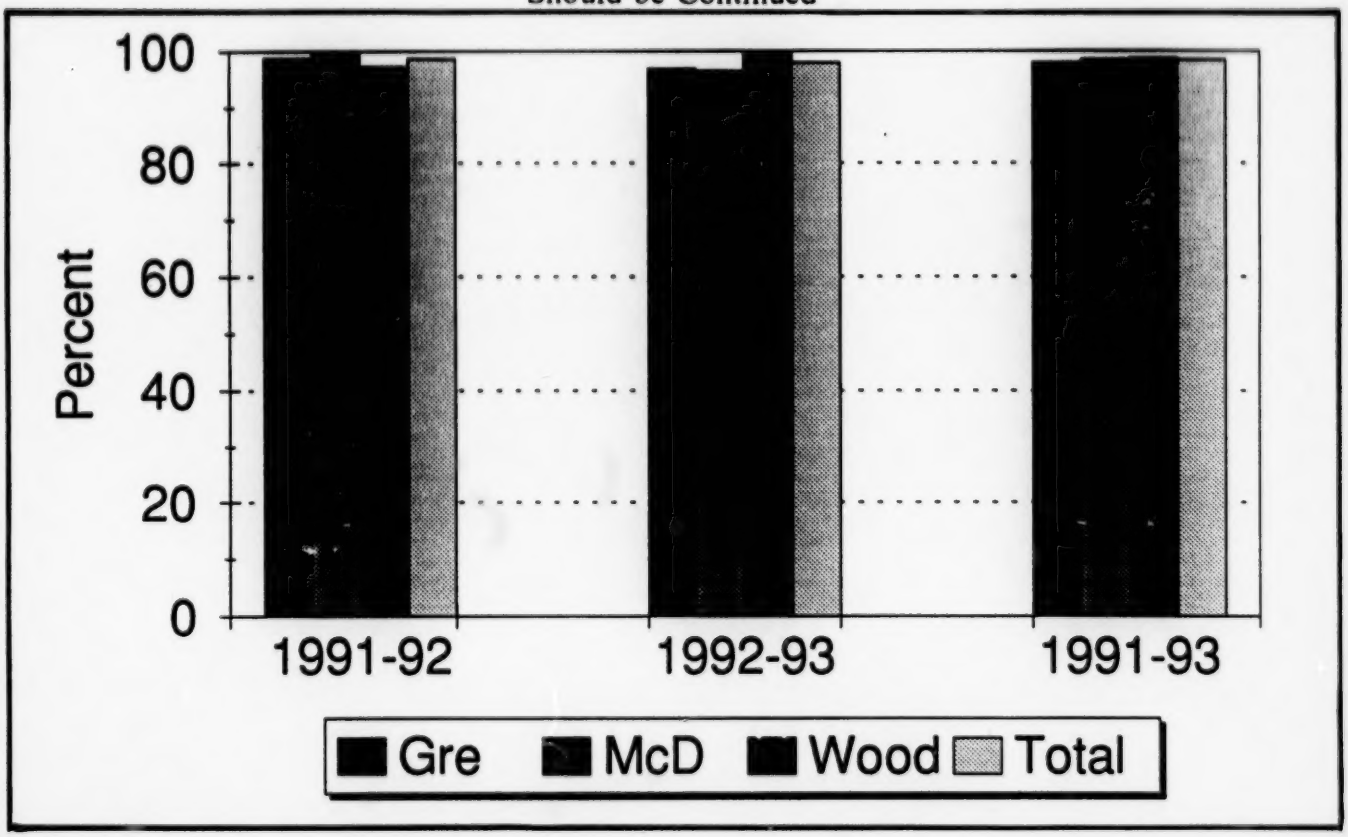
| Benefit | Greenbrier N | Greenbrier Percent | McDowell N | McDowell Percent | Wood N | Wood Percent | Total N | Total Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Medicaid Card | 18 | 43.9 | 20 | 48.8 | 3 | 7.3 | 41 | 100.0 |
| Textbooks | 7 | 3.6 | 58 | 30.2 | 127 | 66.1 | 192 | 99.9 |
| School Supplies | 3 | 1.7 | 55 | 30.4 | 123 | 68.0 | 181 | 100.1 |

Table 12

Frequency and Percent of *Yes* Response by Academic Year to "Do You Believe the Other Benefits Section on the Application Form for Free and Reduced Price School Meals Should Be Continued?"

| County | 1991-92 Yes | 1991-92 Percent | 1992-93 Yes | 1992-93 Percent | Total Yes | Total Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 79 | 35.7 | 60 | 30.5 | 139 | 33.3 |
| McDowell | 69 | 31.2 | 54 | 27.4 | 123 | 29.4 |
| Wood | 73 | 33.0 | 83 | 42.1 | 156 | 37.3 |
| Totals | 221 | 99.9 | 197 | 100.0 | 418 | 100.0 |

Figure 6
Percent of Interviewed Families Who Believed the ***Other Benefits*** Section on the Application Form for Free and Reduced Price School Meals Should be Continued



2. Information on eligibility: medical assistance, dental care, food stamps, children with special needs, child nutrition, vocational programs
3. Counseling for children/families
4. Assistance with eye care and glasses
5. Assistance with dental care
6. After school programs for working mothers
7. Assistance with costs of extra curricular activities, e.g., field trips, sports participation, choir, parent education programs

None of the seven interviewed families who responded the ***Other Benefits*** section should not remain in the application form provided any reasons or rationale for their responses. The seven represent 1.6 percent (7 out of 425) of the interviewed families.

The interviewed families were asked "*Are there ways the school can improve the application process on the lunch program*?". A total of 68 families responded with suggestions for improvement, see Table 13. The most frequently mentioned suggestions for improvement were:

1. Mail the application forms to parents: this ensures the application reaches home.
2. Mail applications before school starts, mail early.
3. One form per family instead of one per child.
4. Assistance in reading and understanding the form; the schools need a telephone "help line".
5. Find way to improve confidentiality, especially for older students.

Table 13

Frequency and Percent of *Yes* Response by Academic Year to "In Your Opinion, Are There Ways the School Can Improve the Application Process on the Lunch Program?"

| County | 1991-92 Yes | 1991-92 Percent | 1992-93 Yes | 1992-93 Percent | Total Yes | Total Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 2 | 5.6 | 3 | 9.4 | 5 | 7.4 |
| McDowell | 10 | 27.8 | 3 | 9.4 | 13 | 19.1 |
| Wood | 24 | 66.7 | 26 | 81.3 | 50 | 73.5 |
| Totals | 36 | 100.1 | 32 | 100.1 | 68 | 100.0 |

## FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations reported herein were gleaned from the data presented in the preceding Section.

Findings

It was found that:

1. There was no significant drop in the number of applications for Free and Reduced Price School Meals between the academic years of 1991-92 and 1992-93.

The three county school systems and the state of West Virginia experienced an increase in the percent of families applying for Free and Reduced Price School Meals despite a decrease in school enrollment during the two-year period under study.

2. The opinions of interviewed families were not significantly different from each other whether they resided in a rural-agricultural county (Greenbrier), a rural-non-agricultural county (McDowell), or an urban county (Wood).

A review of the tabulated responses indicate a family's judgements, opinions, and actions were not statistically different when consideration is given to the family's place of residence.

3. The opinions of interviewed families were not significantly different whether they belonged to the 1991-92 subgroup on the 1992-93 subgroup.

Statistically, no significant differences were found between the opinions of

1991-92 family subgroup and 1992-93 family subgroup.

4. The interviewed families' majority opinions in response to interview questions indicate (a) children received healthy, well-balanced meals, 93 percent affirmative, (b) the application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals was easy to read, 95 percent affirmative; (c) 86 percent of the families signed the waiver of confidentiality; (d) 98 percent of the families believed the ***Other Benefits*** section of the application should be continued, (e) the ***Other Benefits*** received by children due to waiver signing were Medicaid, textbooks, and school supplies.

The majority opinions (86 to 98 percent) expressed by families appear to be supportive of the *Multi-use Application*, the application process, and subsequent benefits to children. However, the reader is referred to the preceding Section on suggestions offered by the families as ways or means to improve or enhance the service and/or process.

5. A majority (56.7 percent) of the families indicated they were interested in receiving Medicaid; however, only 43.2 percent of the families had been contacted by the Department of Health and Human Resources.

Even though 241 of the 425 families (56.7 percent) indicated they were interested in receiving Medicaid, only 104 of the families (43.2 percent) had been contacted by the Department of Health and Human Services. The smallest number of follow-up contacts was in Wood county, and the highest number was in McDowell county.

6. The families had a number of suggestions for improving the application process; these included mailing application to families, establishing a "help" telephone line, requiring only one application per family instead of one application per child.

Conclusions

The conclusions reached for this Study are related to interviewed family responses associated with the Study's specific questions identified in the Study Objectives and Methodology Section of this Report.

1a. Does the West Virginia Department of Education *Multi-use Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals* inhibit or enhance participation of low income children in the National School Lunch Program?

IT IS CONCLUDED the West Virginia *Multi-use Application* neither inhibited nor enhanced participation of low income children in the National School Lunch Program. Eight (8) out of 10 families (80.5 percent) signed the waiver; in the two academic years of the period 1991-92 and 1992-93, the percent of families applying for Free and Reduced Price school meals increased 2.1 percent in West Virginia and 1.8 percent in the three counties, and 98.4 percent of the interviewed families believed the *Other Benefits* (waiver) section on the *Multi-use Application* should be continued.

1b. Is the degree of inhibition or enhancement significantly different between/among a rural-agriculture county, a rural-non-agriculture county, and an urban county?

IT IS CONCLUDED there were no significant differences in the participation rates for children in a rural-agricultural county (Greenbrier), a rural-non-agricultural county (McDowell), and an urban county (Wood) in the National School Lunch Program. It appears the use of the *Multi-use Application* neither inhibited nor

enhanced the rate of participation in the three counties.

2. Has there been a significant increase over the previous year in the number of referrals to the Department of Health and Human Resources for Medicaid information and/or services to eligible children resulting from the use of the *Multi-use Application.*

IT IS CONCLUDED that there was no significant increase over the previous year in the number of referrals. However, there were 41 interviewed families who indicated the Medicaid Card was a benefit received from signing the waiver; this represented 9.6 percent of the interviewed families.

3. Has there been a significant increase over the previous year of providing school textbooks and instructional supplies to the eligible children resulting from the use of the *Multi-use Application*?

IT IS CONCLUDED there has been a significant increase in providing school textbooks and instructional supplies to the eligible children resulting from the use of the *Multi-use Application.* There were 192 families who indicated their children received school textbooks (45.2 percent of the families) and 181 families who indicated their children received instructional supplies (42.6 percent) as benefits received from signing the waiver.

IT IS CONCLUDED the interviewed families supported the use of the ***Other Benefits*** (waiver) section of the *Multi-use Application.* The families approached unanimity (98.4 percent) in wanting the *Other Benefits* section continued in the application; 80.5 percent of the interviewed families signed the waiver.

IT IS CONCLUDED the interviewed families (93.2 percent) believed their

children are receiving healthy, well-balanced meals at school.

4. Does the controlled sharing of information have an effect on *application rates* in the National School Lunch Program? Does it present a barrier to application? Does it discourage people to apply?

A studied review of the data presented in this *Report* indicate the controlled sharing of information does not effect the *application rates*; however, the controlled sharing of information does contribute to the identification of children eligible for services under Medicaid and access to textbooks and instructional supplies.

The sharing of information did not appear to be a barrier to application nor did it discourage people to apply for Free and Reduced Price School Meals.

Recommendations

IT IS RECOMMENDED the ***Other Benefits*** section of the *Multi-use Application for the Free and Reduced Price School Meals* be continued.

The *Other Benefits* (waiver) section was accepted as non-threatening in completing the *Multi-use Application* by the interviewed families, and their children received benefits (e.g., Medicaid, textbooks, and instructional supplies) because the waiver was signed.

IT IS RECOMMENDED school systems use the U.S. Postal Service to distribute the Multi-use Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals.

One school system (Wood County) mailed the *Multi-use Applications* to children's homes, and it appears the families were quite satisfied with this method of receiving the *Applications*. By using this method of distribution, it appears there

were less "lost" *Applications* by the younger students and less "forgotten" *Applications* by the older students.

> IT IS RECOMMENDED the West Virginia model of the *Multi-use Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals* be adopted by the United Stated Department of Agriculture for use by all school districts.

The use of the *Multi-use Application* in West Virginia has been an unequivocal success. It was not a barrier to application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals but had a positive impact upon the physical and intellectual development of children by gaining services and materials for which they are entitled by laws and regulations.

Exhibit A

Calculations to Determine Number of Families
to be Interviewed Per County

Proportioning the sample of 600 families amongst Greenbrier, McDowell, and Wood counties.

"The 600 families will be proportioned by the number of children enrolled in or eligible for Free and Reduced Price School Meals in the three counties."

| County | No. of Approved Children: Oct. 1992 Free | Reduced | Total | Percent of Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 2,376 | 665 | 3,041 | 23.4 |
| McDowell | 4,423 | 540 | 4,963 | 38.2 |
| Wood | 4,014 | 978 | 4,992 | 38.4 |
| Totals | 10,813 | 2,183 | 12,996 | 100.0 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 600 x .234 = 140.4 = 140 families | | |
| McDowell | 600 x .382 = 229.2 = 230 families | | |
| Wood | 600 x .384 = 230.4 = 230 families | | |
| Total | 1.000 | 600.00 | 600 families |

| | No. of Approved FRP Children | No. of Families in Sample | Percent of Families in Sample |
|---|---|---|---|
| Greenbrier | 3,041 | 140 | 4.6 |
| McDowell | 4,963 | 230 | 4.6 |
| Wood | 4,992 | 230 | 4.6 |
| Totals | 12,996 | 600 | 4.6 |

## Exhibit B

## Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE
For
An Evaluation of the Consequences of the Inclusion
of Parental Waivers in the Application for
Free and Reduced Price School Meals

Family Name:_____ Telephone:(H)_____
Date:_____ Time:_____
County:_____Subgroup:_____School Level:_____

Interviewer: Hello, May I speak with (Name of Interviewee). My name is (Name of Interviewer), and I am calling on Behalf of the West Virginia Department of Education. The Department is conducting a study of its school nutrition program, and requests your opinions on the program. This telephone interview will last about 5 to 6 minutes. May I ask you some questions about the application form for Free and Reduced Price School Meals? I assure you your answers will remain confidential.

I. The school lunch program is designed to provide children with healthy and well-balanced meals.

1. Do you believe your child is receiving healthy, well-balanced meals at school?
   a. Yes _____
   b. No _____
   c. If response is No, what are the problems?_____
   _____
   _____

II. In applying for Free and Reduced Price School Meals, you filled out an application form. I would like to ask you some questions about the application form.

1a. For how many of your school age children have you made application to receive Free or Reduced Price School Meals?

i. All_____

ii. Number_____

iii. If not applied for all children, why not?

_____

_____

_____

1b. Was the application form easy to read?

i. Yes_____

ii. No _____

iii. If response is No, what made it difficult? e.g. language hard to understand, the form was too crowded, the check box and signature lines were confusing, arrangement of the form was hard to follow.

2. The application form has a section *Other Benefits*. In this section of the application, you were asked to voluntarily sign a wavier which permitted the school to give your name to the Medicaid Office and allow the school to determine if your child was eligible for free textbooks, workbooks, and other school supplies.

2a. Did you check the box on the application indicating you were interested in Medicaid?

i. Yes _____

ii. No _____

2b. Did you sign the waiver?

i. Yes _____

ii. No _____

iii. If response is No, may I ask why you decided not to sign the waiver? _____

_____

_____

iv. If response is Yes, have you been contacted by the Department of Health and Human Resources concerning Medicaid?

Yes _____

No _____

v. If response is Yes, would you tell me the benefits your child has received because you signed the waiver?

a. Medicaid Card _____

b. Textbooks _____

c. School Supplies _____

d. Other _____

_____

_____

2c. Do you believe the *Other Benefits* section on the application form for Free and Reduced Price School Meals should be continued?

i. Yes _____

ii. No. _____

iii. If response is Yes, what are other possible benefits for children? e.g. vocational education programs.

_____

_____

_____

iv. If response is No, why do you think this section on the application should be discontinued?

_____

_____

_____

2d. In your opinion, are there ways the school can improve the application process on the lunch program?

i. Yes _____

ii. No _____

iii. If response is Yes, what are the ways? _____

_____

_____

Thank you for your time and opinions. You have been very kind in giving your answers. Goodbye.